

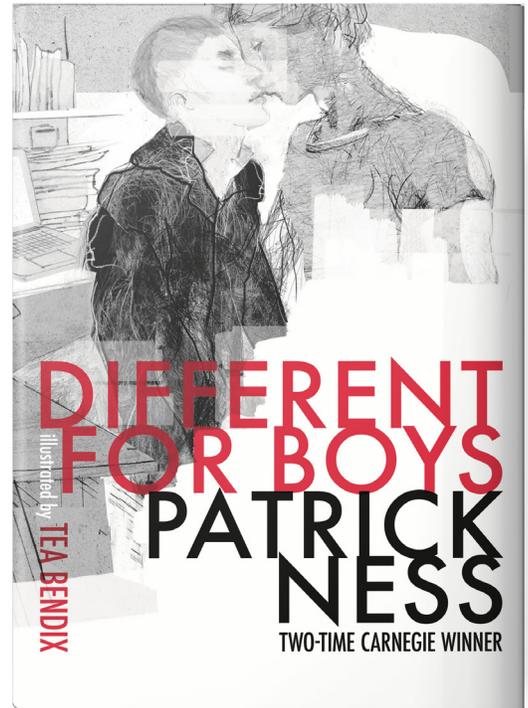
DIFFERENT FOR BOYS

PATRICK NESS

illustrated by TEA BENDIX

ABOUT THE BOOK

Anthony “Ant” Stevenson isn’t sure when he stopped being a virgin. Or even if he has. The rules aren’t always very clear when it comes to boys who like boys. In fact, relationships of all kinds feel complicated, even with Ant’s oldest friends. There’s Charlie, who’s both virulently homophobic and in a secret physical relationship with Ant. Then there’s drama kid Jack, who may be gay and has become the target of Charlie’s rage. And, of course, there’s big, beautiful Josh, who wants Ant to ditch soccer, Charlie’s sport, and try out for the football team instead. Ant’s story of loneliness and intimacy, of unexpected support and heart-ripping betrayal, is told forthrightly with tongue-in-cheek black-bar redactions over the language that teenagers would actually use if, you know, they weren’t in a story. Award-winning author Patrick Ness explores teen sexuality, friendship, and romance with a deft hand in this structurally daring, illustrated short novel.



HC: 978-1-5362-2889-2
Also available as an e-book

ABOUT PATRICK NESS



Photo by Helen Giles

Patrick Ness is the author of the critically acclaimed and best-selling Chaos Walking trilogy, which inspired a major motion picture. He has won numerous awards, including two Carnegie Medals, the *Guardian* Children’s Fiction Prize, the Book Trust Teenage Prize, and the Costa Children’s Book Award. He wrote the screenplay for the film version of his novel *A Monster Calls* as well as the BBC’s *Doctor Who* spinoff *Class*. Patrick Ness lives in Los Angeles.

ABOUT TEA BENDIX



Photo by Jakob Boserup

Tea Bendix is an award-winning illustrator, graphic designer, author, and performer. She works across different media, including picture books, nonfiction, apps, children’s radio, and drawings for TV. Tea Bendix lives in Denmark.

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



WALKER BOOKS US
A DIVISION OF CANDLEWICK PRESS

1. Patrick Ness is well known for his creative and nontraditional storytelling. In *Different for Boys*, he uses black boxes to block out certain words and phrases. What is the purpose of this literary technique?
2. When Charlie asks about the black boxes, Ant replies, “It’s that kind of story. Certain words are necessary because this is real life, but you can’t actually *show* ’em because we’re too young to read about the stuff we actually do, right?” (page 4). What does he mean by this? How do you think it applies to life outside of the book?
3. Ant asks a lot of philosophical questions throughout the book. What are some examples? Does he manage to answer any of these questions? What evidence can you find within the book?
4. Ant is preoccupied with the status of his virginity: “Have I even lost my virginity? Or am I just a virgin with a lot of practice? Because that’s the way it sometimes feels” (page 38). Why do you think Ant is so concerned about this? What makes virginity such a complicated topic for people in general?
5. Ant observes, “Every time, Charlie makes it clear we’re just goofing around, that it’s just a release until we both get girlfriends, and we spend most of our time trying to pretend we aren’t taking it seriously at all” (page 26). Why do you think Charlie tries so hard to make their intimate moments into a joke? What about his insistence that they’ll both get girlfriends—why does Ant go along with it?
6. “We can’t kiss. Because that would make us gay. Gay like Charlie sees all over Jack Taylor” (page 28). Why do you think Charlie is okay with other physical intimacy, but not kissing? How do you think his anti-kissing attitude impacts Ant and how he understands Charlie’s sexuality and his own?
7. In the chapter “What Kind of Story This Is” (page 44), Ant talks a lot about what the story actually isn’t. He mentions certain stereotypes and tropes that are common in TV, movies, and books. Why does he focus on these specific tropes and stereotypes? Do you notice any of them in other books you read or in movies or TV shows you watch? What makes these tropes so popular?
8. After Ant tells Jack that he’s not gay, Jack says, “I mean, do you have any idea how unbelievably  lonely it gets? Feeling like you’re the only one?” (page 57). What kinds of feelings do you think Jack is experiencing after Ant’s denial? Why do you think Ant decided not to come out to Jack in that moment?
9. Ant says, “It’s okay with me, all right? It totally is. I won’t tell anyone, but it’s okay with me” (page 60). Ant is seemingly supportive, but Jack still reacts negatively. Why do you think Jack is so disappointed in Ant’s response?
10. “[T]he biggest sin you can commit is failing a friend. But that’s what I did” (page 58). Throughout the book, there are many times when friends fail each other. What are the reasons behind these failings? Are these friendships able to be fixed?



11. Charlie and Ant have many arguments about football versus soccer (pages 33–34). Why do you think Charlie is so obsessed with Ant trying out for soccer instead of football? Why does he get so angry that Josh is trying to convince Ant to try out for football?
12. Although many other swears and insults are redacted throughout the book, Charlie’s homophobic slurs are not. Why do you think the author leaves these slurs visible?
13. Ant wonders, “Why aren’t I shouting back? Why can’t I yell back all the things that Charlie and I have done together?” (page 78). Why is Ant staying so loyal to Charlie, even after he has hurt Ant, emotionally and physically?
14. After Charlie calls Ant fat, Ant writes, “Really, I’m not. I’m just big. I’m not fat” (page 16). Why do you think Charlie keeps body-shaming Ant? How do you think these comments impact Ant beneath the surface?
15. The title of the novel is a very important line that comes up again and again in Ant’s narrative. Consider all the things this phrase comes up in relation to and discuss why Ant sees these things as “different for boys.”
16. What is the role of shame throughout *Different for Boys*? How does it affect each character? Trace the impacts of shame on the relationships between the boys throughout the book.
17. Ant observes, “I mean, everybody knows somebody gay—duh, it’s not 1980 or something—but not at school” (page 58). Why is it so different at school? Why is it not okay to be openly gay there?
18. There are many emotional scenes in the book, and some of them are accompanied by illustrations. How do the illustrations affect the impact of these scenes? How can they change or heighten the emotional aspects of these moments?
19. After reading the book, think about what you would consider its main themes. After writing them down, pick one and cite evidence from the book to support your chosen theme.
20. How did the black boxes affect your reading experience overall? Why do you think the author gave Ant awareness of the black boxes within the story?



Illustration © 2023 by Tea Bendix